Labor & Trade Union Newsletter in Palestine – March & April 2020 # (5)

Covid-19 pandemic affects the livelihoods of more than 453 thousand Palestinian workers

In view of the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected all aspects of citizens' lives, we cannot ignore that workers are the group most affected by the pandemic. In this context, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) presented indicators on the status of the labor market and establishments in Palestine, indicating that the Covid-19 pandemic affected more than 453 thousand Palestinian workers. More than 45% of the workers and an estimated 1,850,000 family members, including children, the elderly and dependent spouses, have been left without any source of income that would enable them to meet their basic needs in terms of food and means of protection, in particular women's needs for sanitary and hygiene products.

As a result of the state of emergency declared by the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Cabinet's decision to suspend work in many economic activities, only 26.2% of the total number of establishments in the private sector are still operating (i.e. 37,336 establishments out of 142,400). These include hospitals, care activities and residential nursing care activities, and social work activities for the elderly and persons with disabilities, which are still operating fully. In addition, some establishments are operating at 25% - 40% of their capacities and workforce, including: manufacture of food, manufacture of chemicals, manufacture of soap and cleaning products, manufacture of pharmaceuticals, electric power generation, manufacture and distribution of gas, steam and air conditioning supply, water sector, waste collection, freight transport by road, journalism, radio & TV sector, wired and wireless telecommunication activities, some sales activities, and other monetary intermediation. These establishments are currently employing 105,345 workers, out of 424,904 wage workers in the private sector.

According to the PCBS, there are several categories of employed individuals, who will be directly affected by the situation in Palestine, including 320,000 workers employed in the informal sector, and 133,300 Palestinian workers working in Israel and Israeli settlements. Palestinian workers in the Israeli labor market has been exposed to a particularly harsh and degrading situation, which violates most basic and fundamental human rights and freedoms. The Israeli Occupying Power took several measures against Palestinian workers.

To read more about the situation of Palestinian Workers working in Israel, please click here.

Covid-19 pandemic leaves thousands of Female kindergarten workers without any source of income, after closure of all educational organization

Female kindergarten workers in the private sector have been living difficult economic conditions after their source of income was cut off, after the closure of all educational institutions, as part of the precautionary measures imposed by the Palestinian National Authority to address the spread of (Covid-19) pandemic. The Minister of Education has not set a date yet for reopening schools, which might be in August at the earliest. Large numbers of kindergarten workers receive their salaries from monthly fees paid by students' parents, noting that many of these workers in normal conditions are paid below the minimum wage.

For the past two months, many kindergarten workers have not received any payment, despite the tripartite agreement that stipulated that employers should pay at least 50% of the wages of private sector workers for March and April in the sectors affected by the measures taken due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of them continued working from homes through distance learning mechanisms. The Kindergarten, Private Schools and Day Care Centers Workers' Union in the West Bank submitted an appeal endorsed by 412 workers from Bethlehem, Nablus, Tulkarem, Hebron and Ramallah governorates to the Labor Ministry requesting the payment of their salaries, as a large number of them are responsible for supporting entire families.

In the Gaza Strip, where wage levels in normal circumstances are much lower than in the West Bank, workers have received no salaries either since the beginning of the state of emergency. Female kindergarten & day-care center workers in Gaza issued a statement demanding payment of their wages and access to assistance during the state of emergency, as they do not have any other source of income. They also called upon everyone to fulfill their legal and moral duties towards their rights, highlighting the necessity to allocate part of the aid reached to Palestine to the categories of workers who lost their employment opportunities while respecting the decision of confinement to their homes.

DWRC launches an awareness campaign in partnership with Labor and Health Ministries about occupational and general health and safety in workplaces in Gaza

The Democracy and Workers' Rights Center in Palestine, in partnership with the Labor and Health Ministries in Gaza, launched an awareness campaign on Monday 13/04/2020 to follow up on occupational safety and prevention mechanisms at workplaces in light of the risks related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This campaign forms part of activities held on the occasion of World Day for Safety and Health at Work, and aims to raise workers' awareness about the importance of complying with prevention mechanisms and following all safety measures at work to preserve their health and create a safe work environment. So far 30 inspection and awareness visits to workplaces were implemented, and the campaign will continue due to needs. In addition to the awareness meeting about work environment hazards and risks related to the Covid-19 pandemic, awareness posters will be displayed in workplaces on ways to prevent Covid-19 infection at work. DWRC will also provide safety and protection equipment for workers, which were donated by the Italian people through the Italian Center for Cultural Exchange.

As part of the campaign, DWRC organized a digital workshop about safety and health during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the participation of union representatives. The workshop focused on how to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic according to the specificities of each work sector, and general mechanisms for prevention. Participants made a number of comments and recommendations during the workshop, calling for continuous monitoring of the implementation of prevention measures in workplaces, stressing the importance of pursuing awareness raising efforts and submitting complaints to the Labor Ministry, if employers do not provide occupational safety and health requirements. ***Click here for more details about the workshop.***

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the vulnerability of Street Vendors in the Gaza Strip, due to measures taken to prevent the spread, the authorities in Gaza decided to close weekly public markets, as well as schools and universities, and banned any gatherings on beaches and in public spaces, where the unemployed used to display simple goods, hoping that they will be able to sell them to secure a livelihood for their families. In addition, Measures to organize, control and remove street vendors from their chosen locations have been amplified since the Covid-19 pandemic started. Measures taken are not fair to street vendors, who depend on their stalls and carts to earn a daily income in the midst of an already difficult economic context that has worsened due to successive crises. ***Click here for more details.***